



FREDERICK COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

August 10, 2011

TITLE: Mount Saint Mary's Welcome Center
at The National Shrine Grotto of
Lourdes

FILE NUMBER: SP 84-22 (AP #11850, APFO #11851
& FRO #11852)

REQUEST: Site Plan
The applicant is proposing to construct a 7,249 square
foot Welcome/Visitor's Center building.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

LOCATION: Located along Grotto Road, north of St Anthony Road.
ZONE: Zoned: Ie (Euclidian Institutional)
REGION: Thurmont
WATER/SEWER: Water and Sewer Classification: M-U (Multi-use Private).
COMP. PLAN/LAND USE: Institutional

APPLICANT/REPRESENTATIVES: (as applicable)

APPLICANT: Mount St. Mary's University
OWNER: Mount St. Mary's University
ENGINEER: C.S. Davidson, Inc.
ARCHITECT: Not Listed
ATTORNEY: Not Listed

STAFF: Tolson DeSa, Principal Planner

RECOMMENDATION: Conditional Approval

Enclosures:

Exhibit #1-Site Plan Rendering

Exhibit #2- Modification Requests for the following Zoning Ordinance Sections;

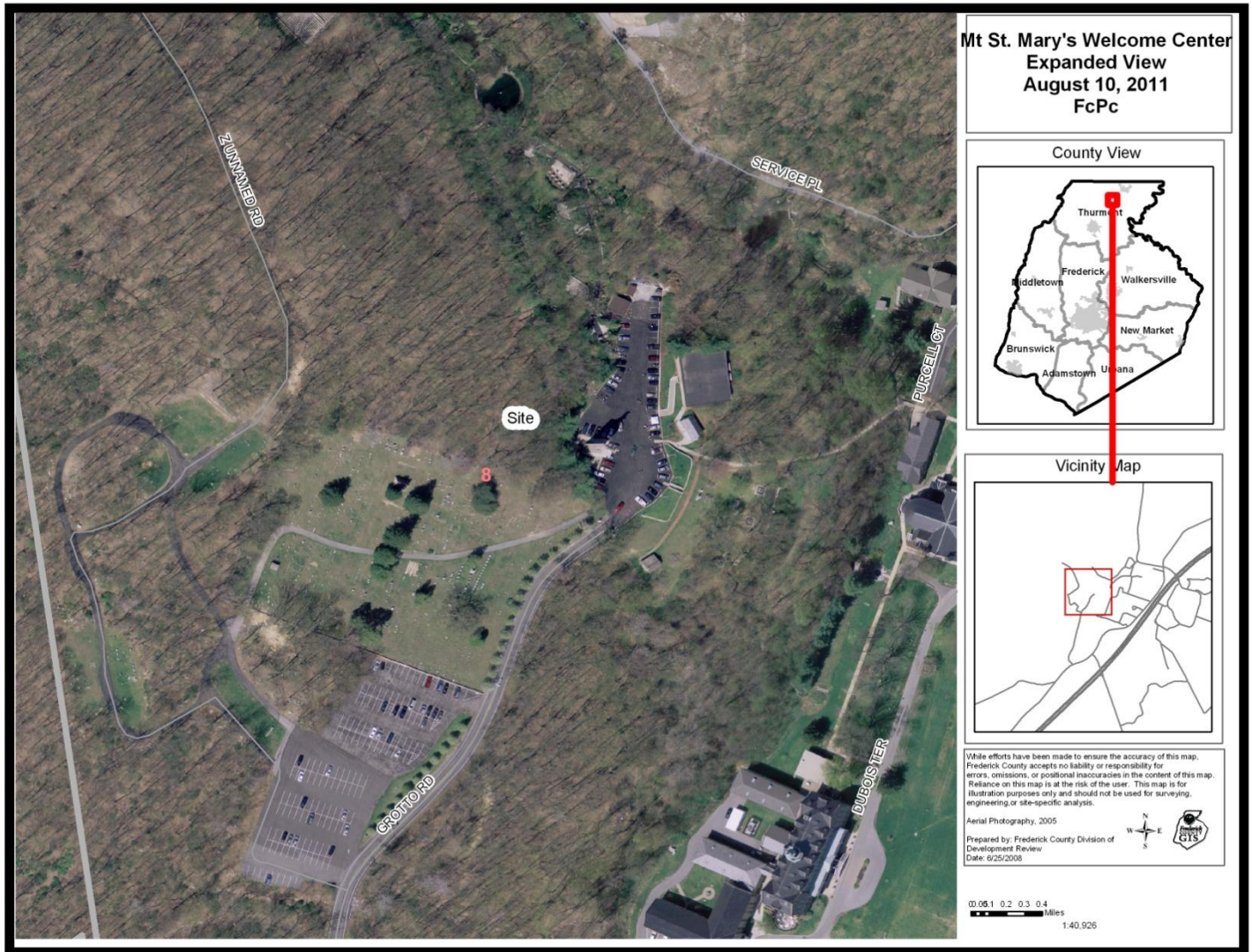
- a) Section 1-19-6.400.I-Landscaping Ordinance Modification for alternative Landscape Plan
- b) Section 1-19-6.210.D-Loading Space Modification Justification

STAFF REPORT

BACKGROUND

Present Proposal:

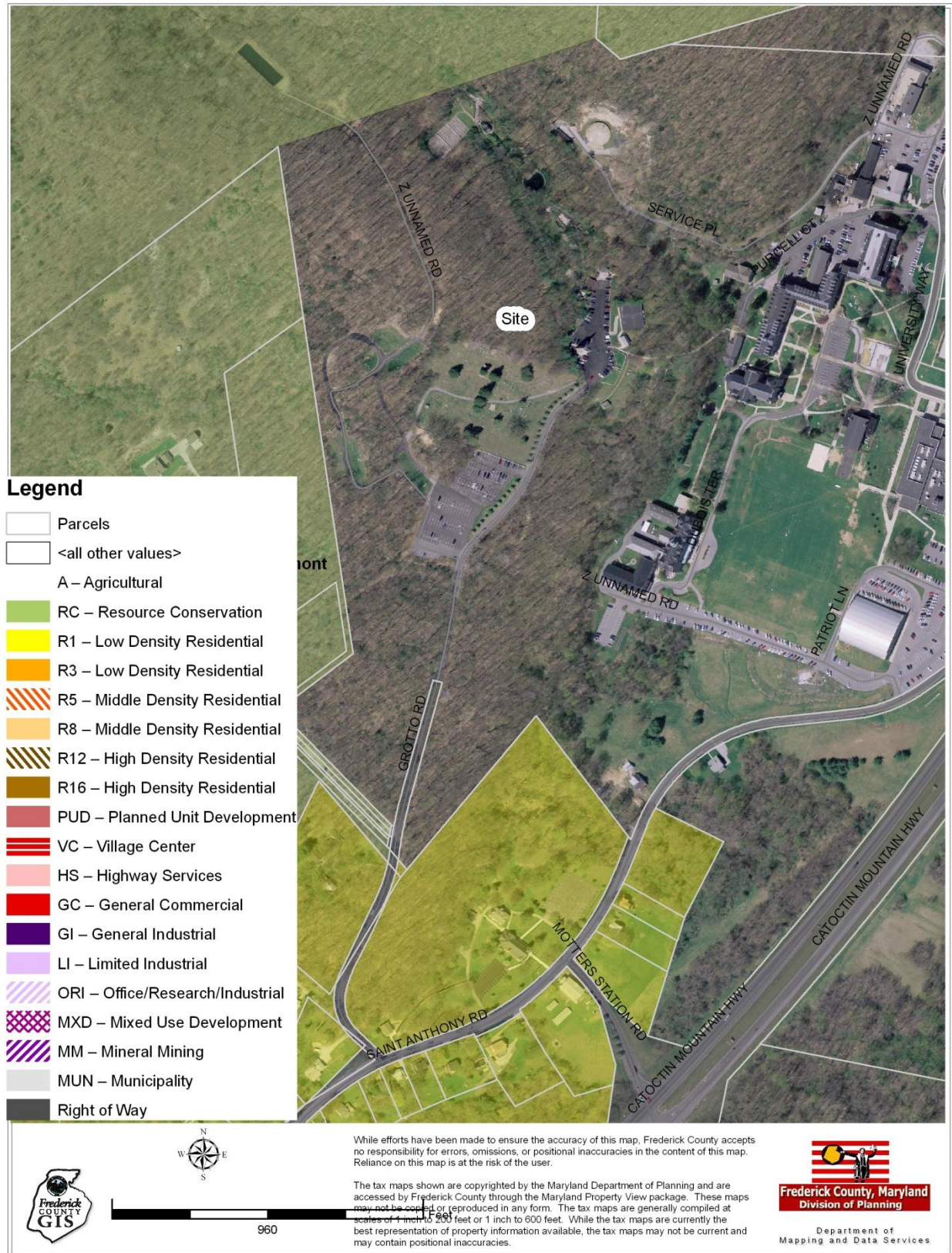
The Applicant is requesting site plan approval for a 2-story, 7,249 square foot “Welcome Center/Visitor’s Center” adjacent to the existing Bell Tower Statue at The National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes, located along Grotto Road, north of St. Anthony Road.



ANALYSIS

Land Use: The proposed use is being reviewed as an “Place of Worship/Visitor’s Center” under *Institutional* per §1-19-5.31 in the Zoning Ordinance and is a principal permitted use in the (Ie) Zoning District subject to site development plan approval.

Zoning: The site is located within the Euclidian Institutional (Ie) Zoning District.



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Frederick County Comprehensive Plan: Thurmont Region

The Frederick County Comprehensive Plan indicates that the land use for this property is Institutional. The use proposed for the parcel complies with the Land Use designation within the County Comprehensive Plan.

Dimensional Requirements/Bulk Standards: Section 1-19-6.100 of the Zoning Ordinance stipulates the setback requirements and the minimum lot area for the proposed use. The setback requirements are 40-foot front yard and 50-foot rear yard, with 50-foot side yards. The maximum height allowed is 30 feet; the Applicant is proposing 37.3 feet. The minimum lot size for the zoning district is 5 acres.

Per Section 1-19-6.160 of the Zoning Ordinance, additional height can be allowed if for each 3 feet of increased height of the structure, the required side and rear yard setbacks are increased by an additional foot. Therefore, the proposed height increase to 37.3 feet requires an additional 2.4 feet of side and rear yard setback. The Applicant has provided the additional setback area proportionate to the proposed height increase.

The proposed plan meets the Bulk/Dimensional requirements.

Access/Circulation: The access will be via the existing Grotto Road, which is located to the north of St. Anthony Rd. The Applicant is proposing a traffic circle that serves as the entryway into the Visitor's Center and the adjacent parking areas.

Public Transit: This site is not served by public Transit.

Parking: Pursuant to §1-19-6.22 of the Zoning Ordinance, 1 parking space is required for every 400 square feet of floor area. Therefore, 7,249 square feet of floor area requires 18 spaces. The Applicant is providing parking via an existing 26 space lot to the north of the proposed Visitor Center, as well as a 150 space lot to the south, including 2 ADA accessible spaces.

On June 9, 2011, the Applicant provided a Traffic Management Plan (TMP) to Staff for review. The TMP calculated that the parking provided was adequate for typical daily use for the Visitor's Center and the Grotto. Parking for low and high impact events will be managed by the recommendations contained in the referenced TMP.

Loading Area: The Applicant has requested a loading space modification in accordance with Zoning Ordinance Section 1-19-6.210.D. The Applicant does not have the need for any loading spaces associated with this site and use. Staff supports granting this modification request.

Landscaping: The Applicant is requesting a modification from the Landscaping Ordinance Section 1-19-6.400.A.2.c, in order to provide an alternate planning design to the Planning Commission. Staff supports this modification request.

The Grotto site is part of an historic district and is also significant due to its religious and cultural identity. The proposed improvements have been designed to fit within the natural surroundings of the Grotto landscape and minimize disturbance as much as possible in order to preserve the original context of the site.

The location of the proposed Welcome Center is well within the overall Mount St. Mary's campus and is surrounded by existing vegetation and forest, with the nearest roadside located approximately 1000 feet away.

Utilities: The site is to be served by private water and sewer and is classified M-U (Multi-use Private).

Bicycle Parking: The Applicant is required to provide two bicycle racks.

Lighting: The Applicant is providing lighting by building mounted lights only. The Applicant has noted on the plan that lighting will not exceed 0.5 ft/candles at the periphery of the site and lighting will be directional onto the site through the use of shielding and lighting orientation.

Signage: This site plan is not proposing any signage on site.

Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO):

This project is exempt from APFO for Roads, Schools and Water/Sewer. As a non-residential use, there is no public school impact, and *DUSWM* has stated that the public water and sewer facilities proposed to serve the property would appear to adequate at the time for this development. The development of the visitor's center alone would not appear to increase peak hour traffic during the peak hours of US 15, that is the morning and evening rush hours nor more than 50 trips during the peak hour of the site on weekends, therefore, the site is exempt from APFO for Roads.

A concern was expressed by staff that during peak seasonal visitation, a traffic management plan (TMP) be submitted, approved and implemented by the applicant. The TMP was developed by Wells and Associates, and the final version approved by SHA and the County, dated July 12, 2011, is referenced in the plan and noted to be implemented. This plan involves the placement of variable message signs and point control personnel to direct traffic in the most efficient manner reasonable as primary lots fill and satellite lots become the necessary destination.

Forest Resource Ordinance (FRO): The Applicant has noted on the plan that FRO requirements for the site have been met through the use of forest banking credits.

OTHER AGENCY COMMENTS

Other Agency or Ordinance Requirements	Comment
Development Review Engineering (DRE):	Approved
Development Review Planning:	A few minor drafting issues noted in Hansen, in addition to items listed in the report.
State Highway Administration (SHA):	N/A.
Div. of Utilities and Solid Waste Mngt. (DUSWM):	N/A
Health Dept.	Approved
Office of Life Safety	Approved
DPDR Traffic Engineering	Approved
Historic Preservation	Approved

FINDINGS

Based on the discussion in this report and with the conditions listed below, Staff finds that the application meets and/or will meet all applicable Zoning, APFO and FRO requirements once the conditions of approval have been met.

Staff notes that if the Planning Commission conditionally approves the site plan, the site plan is valid for a period of three (3) years from the date of Planning Commission approval.

Staff has no objection to conditional approval of the site plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Should the Planning Commission conditionally approve this Site Plan SP # 84-22 (AP# 11850, APFO 11851 & FRO 11852) for the proposed Mt. Saint Mary's Welcome Center, the motion for approval should include the following item:

1. Site plan approval for a period of three years from today's date.
2. Approval of Zoning Ordinance Modification requests for the following code sections:
 - a. §1-19-6.400.I Alternate Landscape Requirements
 - b. §1-19-6.210.D Loading Space Modification

Staff recommends that the following items be added as conditions of approval:

1. Address all agency comments as the plan proceeds through completion.
2. Note approval of Zoning Ordinance Modification requests for the following code sections on the site plan:
 - a. §1-19-6.400.I Alternate Landscape Requirements
 - b. §1-19-6.210.D Loading Space Modification

Exhibit #1 Overall Site Plan: Mt. St Mary's Welcome Center



Mt. St. Mary's Welcome Center at The National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes

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Exhibit #2 Modification Requests: Mt St Mary's Welcome Center

38 North Duke Street
York, PA 17401
(717) 846-4805
FAX (717) 846-5811

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July 27, 2011

Mr. Tolson DeSa, Principal Planner
Community Development Division
Frederick County, Maryland
30 North Market Street
Frederick, MD 21701

Re: Mount St. Mary's University
Welcome Center at the Grotto
Loading Space Modification
Engineer's Project No.: 3692.3.01.00
County Project #11850

Dear Mr. DeSa:

As you are aware, Mount St. Mary's University is proposing to construct a Welcome Center at the Grotto immediately adjacent to the existing parking lot and Grotto shrine. The Frederick County Code typically requires the provision of a loading space for development projects.

The Welcome Center is not expected to require deliveries that would necessitate the use of a designated loading zone. According to a University representative, the only deliveries to be expected would be accomplished through the use of a van, which could use the parking that is provided on the site. Since it is likely that only one box of goods would be delivered at a time, a designated loading zone would not be required for this use. Furthermore, the location of a loading zone directly in front of or close to the Welcome Center and the Pangborn Memorial Campanile/bell tower would, in our opinion, detract from the overall appearance and reverent nature of the site.

Pursuant to Section 1-19-6.210.D in the Zoning Ordinance, we respectfully request a modification from the requirement to provide a loading zone at this site. We appreciate the Planning Commission's consideration of this request in order to assist the University in maintaining the sacred nature of the site as much as is possible.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 717-814-4526 or via email at bse@csdaavidson.com.

Sincerely,

C. S. DAVIDSON, INC.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin S. Craddock". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Benjamin S. Craddock, PE, LEED AP

BSC/gkm
Enclosure
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Mr. Tolson DeSa, Principal Planner
Community Development Division
Frederick County, Maryland
30 North Market Street
Frederick, MD 21701

Re: Mount St. Mary's University
Welcome Center at the Grotto
Alternate Landscaping Modification
Engineer's Project No.: 3692.3.01.00
County Project #11850

Dear Mr. DeSa:

As you are aware, Mount St. Mary's University is proposing to construct a Welcome Center at the Grotto immediately adjacent to the existing parking lot and Grotto shrine. The Frederick County Code typically requires the installation of landscaping such as street trees and screening around parking lots to provide buffering for adjacent uses and roadways.

The Grotto site is part of a historic district and is also significant due to its religious and cultural identity. As such, the proposed improvements have been designed to fit within the natural surroundings of the Grotto landscape and minimize disturbance as much as possible in order to preserve the original context of the site. Furthermore, the location of the proposed Welcome Center is well within the overall Mount St. Mary's campus and is completely surrounded by existing vegetation and forest. The nearest roadway to the site is located over 1000 feet away. Given these considerations, the existing forest and landscaping meet the intent of the Zoning Ordinance, in our opinion, by providing natural screening and buffering for the use and the associated parking area, while also maintaining the historic nature of the area.

Pursuant to Section 1-19-6.400.I in the Zoning Ordinance, we respectfully request a modification for an alternative landscaping submission due to the existing landscaping at the site. The enclosed site rendering is provided to show the extent of the existing vegetation that currently surrounds the site. We appreciate the Planning Commission's consideration of this request in order to assist the University in preserving as much of the historical nature of this site as possible.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 717-814-4526 or via email at bsc@csdaavidson.com.

Sincerely,

C. S. DAVIDSON, INC.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin S. Craddock". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Benjamin S. Craddock, PE, LEED AP

BSC/gkm

Enclosure

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